

FIVE MINUTE SERMON

BY REV. WILLIAM DEMOUY, D. D.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY
AFTER PENTECOST

SATAN'S LAST STAND

"At that time: Jesus said to His disciples: When therefore you shall see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place: he that readeth let him understand." (Matt. xxiv. 15.)

The Gospel of this Sunday suggests to us the last day of the world. The Lord has kept from our knowledge the time when "it will come to pass: but those who will be living when the signs spoken of will appear, can tell that the world is at an end. No doubt these signs will presage to every living being that earthly life will be no more. They will not, however, as Our Lord tells us more or less clearly in this same Gospel, convince every one of the truth. The devil will be making his last struggle to capture man, and will have his agents active among people of every class and creed. Our Lord warns us that all must fear Satan and his agents, even the best among men. They will strive to deceive even the elect. Antichrists will be on the scene in great numbers. In a word, people living then will have the greatest temptations of their lives, and will be in the midst of the greatest dangers to their moral safety. However, even then, surrounded by these dangers, they will not be tempted beyond that which they can resist. Many, no doubt, will fall; but it will be their own fault, and this weakness in them will be more because of past carelessness and laxity than the result of the sudden attack of the enemy of our salvation. The weapon to be employed, as in all temptations, is our will, assisted by God's grace. And the more grace there is in us, the stronger will be our will. But where our will is weak, or where there is no grace, the fall will be inevitable.

However, rather than consider that terrible event of the hidden future itself, let us think a little of what man's attitude toward it is, and what it should be. To be brief, if we truthfully search into man, we shall find that to him, the end of the world is the end of himself. He considers the world ended when it has ended for him. He does not think, as a rule, of the ending of the earth's existence, but of the closing of his own, of the time when he will be no more. His world is the world of his lifetime. Or it may as well be eternal as far as he is concerned as long as it lasts during his span of natural life. In fact, more of us think that the world will end, and thereby bring about our own destruction; we think that our end will come about in a different way. All this is true of us, because we do not know when the world will end; and we have had no signs convincing enough to tell us that there is any possibility of it ending during our lifetime. Within our hearts we know differently, and realize what could come about; but we do not spend much time in speculating about these truths.

Nor should we be censured too strongly for our attitude in this matter, since it is true that, once we have left the world, we never can return. And though we may have loved ones yet upon earth who are still mindful of us, we must remain separated from them as long as they live; and their thoughts of us can give us no aid unless they are turned into prayers.

However, to come down to a more practical point, we should realize that the world is not eternal. It is well for us to recall that our temporal existence will come to an end; and it is well for us to remember also that the world will cease to be. When we consider death, this thought is, or should be, helpful to us; when we consider the end of the world, this thought also should aid us in many ways. The fact that we must some day give up our present life for a future one—this future life to be what we make it for ourselves—is a great incentive to us to live well. The fact that the world is not to last always also should be a great incentive to us for effecting good work.

It is not sufficient for us to say to ourselves: We must abstain from many things in life, because our present life is short, and only things of lasting good and future merit should be indulged in. But we must also say: We should not serve the world too much, we should not indulge in its pleasures to excess, or even to satiety, for it is not lasting. The combination of these two limitations to our natural desires, is more productive of good in us than only one of them would be. And there is no doubt that Christ has told us that the world is not to last forever, in order that this truth may sink deep into our hearts and do its share in the gaining of merit.

In fact, do not people serve the world more than is good for them, considering that the world will end, as well as the fact that they themselves must die? It is true that the world is better today, perhaps, than at some other periods since its creation, because of the work done in it by certain individuals or classes of men; but the work of these men was not done for the world itself directly. It was done for a cause, or in pursuit of a virtue that would, on account of its prevalence and practice, benefit the world. He who serves the world directly for the world's sake will

confer no permanent benefit upon the world, nor gain any great lasting merit for himself. Many have attempted this, and their names live today, but among whom? Certainly not among good Christian people.

Here is a distinction people so often fail to make: God gave us the world, but He does not ask us to add anything to the world itself; on the contrary, we are to use it in order to add something to ourselves—namely, merit. It seems to be selfishness, but it is selfishness that is justified. God created the world beautiful. He gave it many forces. All these He could have made greater had He desired, but He gave to the universe what is sufficient for man to use in order to attain to the end intended for him. Man need not try to add to any of these forces himself. He can not do it. It sometimes may appear that he does enhance the beauty of certain parts of the earth, but this is only accidental, not essential, beauty; and by thus doing man does not really add anything but only brings into effect the powers God has instilled in the earth. Man may, for instance, make the once barren earth bear flowers and fruits, but God gave the earth that does it, and He gave to the earth the trees and the plants from which the seeds and the sprouts originally sprang.

Christian people, then, should use the world as far as it will benefit them for their temporal existence, during which existence they must prepare themselves for future happiness. If they use the world beyond this point, they will be using it for ends other than those intended by God. And God can not reward them for the use they make of it, when this use is merely a search for pleasure. Do not some expect too much when, after having enjoyed as fully as possible the world's pleasures—passing as they are—they expect God to reward them with eternal happiness? He said practically of such persons, "Behold, they have their reward."

A RETROSPECT AND AN OUTLOOK

Without any consequences of a serious and fatal nature that might have endangered the stability of the present social order and brought on an upheaval of far-reaching economic importance, we have once more, after critical moments of fearful suspense and torturing anxiety, emerged from a situation that was charged with explosive possibilities and fraught with elements of grave menace. The two great strikes which nearly brought the industries of the country to a complete standstill, have been temporarily settled by a compromise, that satisfies neither of the contending parties and that manifestly contains the germs of new disputes, which are waiting for an opportune moment to break out again. All that has been gained is a brief respite, a short breathing spell. There is nothing final, nothing definite in the agreement reached after much wrangling and under pressure brought to bear from without. This is not said in a spirit of pessimism or resigned hopelessness; it is rather meant to stimulate efforts that will discover means by which similar occurrences may be averted and that will ensure a real and enduring economic peace.

A genuine economic peace that will not only benefit the employer and the wage-earner, but that will make for the prosperity of all and promote the welfare of society, is, after all, not an impossibility. Even in a world, in which the clashing of interests is inevitable, it still is feasible. Fundamentally and if rightly understood and properly co-ordinated, human interests are not antagonistic. With some measures of good will and with a reasonable degree of coercion on the part of organized society, they can be harmonized in such a manner that open conflict and actual hostility are avoided. It is precisely for this end, namely the integration of the various human interests in a higher synthesis, that civil authority has been established. In order to effect this very desirable purpose, in which all the members of society are tremendously concerned, a formula must be sought that will strike a fair balance between the rights of capital and labor and that will do justice to the legitimate aspirations of both. To deny the possibility of such a formula is equivalent to saying that warfare is the normal condition of men here on earth and that conflict is the source of human progress. This theory, once in vogue and ardently championed by a group of materialistic philosophers, has, however, in our days been completely abandoned. It is now regarded as an axiom that civilization is based on co-operation and that the interests of humanity are best served by team-work.

The formula, destined to put a stop to the periodical conflicts between the interests of capital and labor, must have a sound ethical basis and a religious reinforcement. Solutions that do not take into account the ethical factor and that have no religious orientation have proved inadequate and unavailing. This conviction is born in forcibly upon every one who studies with an open eye and a seeing mind the history of labor troubles, which emphatically teaches this unmistakable lesson that the lack of ethical inspiration is primarily responsible

for the failure of the recent past in solving our industrial difficulties. The radical vice of the settlement just arrived at is this, that it leaves the contracting parties in the same mutual attitude in which they were when the mighty conflict started. They are now, as before, opponents with widely diverging aims and with no common bond. It is plain that an agreement entered upon under such conditions cannot be enduring. What is needed is a change of mentality and a chastening of the heart. Capital and labor must learn that they are partners and that their ultimate salvation lies in understanding and mutual help. They must realize that their duty is to render service to society and that the privileges which they enjoy can be continued only on condition that they conscientiously live up to their social obligations.

The false doctrine that they are supreme and that they are not beholden to society, they must frankly repudiate. If it were not for society, we would have no organized industry. Consequently, industry must remain subordinated to the larger good of society. This truth, elementary though it is, has been thoroughly forgotten both by capital and labor.

This partnership, however, must not merely be asserted. It must be actual and real. It can be secured only by a reorganization of industry on new lines. This is the only conceivable antidote against ever-recurring strikes, lockouts and conflicts, which will either bring upon society economic ruin and bankruptcy or drive it into the arms of socialism. In such an alternative it ought not to be difficult for sensible men to choose.—Catholic Standard and Times.

BLATANT SIGN-BOARDS

An eminent lecturer recently quoted from Lord Bacon the four reasons why men do not advance in knowledge. And by knowledge he meant more than mere information on certain topics. He meant the clear perception of facts as they are and ought to be, not as they are cried out to be by every blatant sign-board along the street.

These four reasons are intensely interesting when examined in turn and brought home to the individual by personal introspection. Lord Bacon enumerates them as: the trust in inadequate authority; the force of custom which leads men to accept without question what has been accepted before their time; the placing of confidence in the opinion of the inexperienced; the hiding of one's own ignorance with a parade of superficial knowledge.

How far some men of today place their reliance in inadequate authority for their information is clearly to be seen. In the street cars and other public conveyances, on the bill-boards, day after day, they are forcibly attracted to the brightly-colored posters in conspicuous places which advertise certain facts in a most aggressive manner.

Day after day, reading the same posters, convincing, compelling as they are—they are gradually led to believe that the facts which they state are true. So, day after day, although men sometimes do not realize it, they are taking the opinions of other people for their own. Sometimes,—alas often as Lord Bacon aptly says—their authority is painfully inadequate.

Who has strayed along a quiet mountain road, far from the glare of the cities, where the brooklets ripple over their stony beds and friendly dumb creatures wander out from the roadside unafraid of the wayfarer,—to come suddenly upon a giant figure of cardboard, clothed in scarlet, guarding the turn of the road, and with uplifted hand bidding us pause and listen to his message? We are annoyed to find our solitude encroached upon. We rightly resent the intrusion. For we are told that we are a race of cliff-dwellers and that we belong back there where whole blocks are devoted to the interests of the automobile of which this startling crimson figure reminds us in no uncertain manner. We are justly annoyed,—and yet we are forced to consider the message that a certain brand of tire is infinitely superior to all others, and the reasons for the deduction.

The trend of modern thought, the highly standardized forms of advertising which confront us on every side, the blatant sign-board, whether it be a thing of paint and paper or a living animate being—is apt to make life a bit unreal and to dwarf human nature if we allow ourselves to become submerged in this swift current.

Toward the end of his life, Darwin confessed with no little regret that he had lost his appreciation for music and art and poetry, and felt that he had become a mere machine for grinding out scientific opinions.

In a world where there is too much to choose from,—how to choose wisely is the question. For men have acknowledged too late that a wide and free and careless choice has brought deplorable results to their peace and happiness. Too late men of brilliant intellect and noble heart, whose lives might have been fruitful and beautiful, have yearned for the wisdom of Rene Bazin's little peasant girl, Pascale, who was wise enough to fear herself.

Careful discrimination is necessary in these days when teachers are many and lessons run riot in

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daily journal and best seller as well as on the public platform and in the scenario. Imitation is a common practice. We are all prone to imitate,—indeed we must imitate. But why select as models those things which we hear advertised from the wayside pulpits of the world in the strident and blatant voice of the charlatan?

One has no need to wander in a maze, seeking the highest and best in these times when there is easy access to such treasures if men but look in the right direction. Things true and tired and tested will readily be found to supplant these poor shams which are cried out from the sign-boards of the world.

A great French churchman of a past century berates this tendency to drift with modern opinion and to follow the dictates of every self-constituted preacher. In his exhortations to the young men of his day, he urges to the habit of "despising reputations, however great, which have been won by misguided effort, and to value in a man only what is good and true."

"This system," he writes, in a certain reference, "so far as I am acquainted with it, tends to destroy the certitude of facts and traditions. It turns to fables and allegories events around which time has thrown a haze, and hence it is untrustworthy and dangerous."

He begs his hearers not to be imposed upon by modern writings. "Nearly all are tainted by pride, sensuality or scepticism, or by a spirit of prophecy remarkable only for the rashness of the dreamers who yield to it."

As an antidote to this current of unsafe thought this true philosopher advocates the closer study of the ancients, alleging that even pagans such as Plato, Plutarch and Cicero were a thousand times better than the mass of our modern writers. "They were religious men with respect for tradition, who looked upon daily intercourse with the Godhead as the only means

whereby men could reach perfection."

Even the good—even the good—we are told, weakened in their deepest convictions by contact with error, have put forth false and dangerous opinions in their best works.

An over-ready acceptance of the opinions put before us on the great highway of life by those who have passed by earlier in the day, leaves the soul like the ailing exotic which Father Faber so aptly describes, stunted in growth, with a few pale sickly leaves scarcely hanging to its boughs and sterile of fruit.—The Pilot.

Charity and cheerfulness, or charity and humility, should be our motto.—St. Philip Neri.

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